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SUBJECT: ISRAEL MEDIA REACTION

SUBJECTS COVERED IN THIS REPORT:

Mideast

Key stories in the media:

Ha'aretz quoted sources in Washington as saying on Tuesday that Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice plans to tell PA Chairman

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[President] Mahmoud Abbas at their meeting Thursday that he must increase his efforts to impose order in the PA, in order not to miss the opportunity to resume negotiations offered by the Gaza cease-fire and PM Ehud Olmert's speech in Sde Boker on Monday. The sources were quoted as saying that Secretary Rice will pledge America's aid in strengthening Abbas's position, but will stress that the US expects results from him in return. Ha'aretz quoted Israeli officials as saying that Washington understands that further progress depends on the success of the cease-fire, which took effect on Sunday. Ha'aretz wrote that, as of Tuesday night, it was still unclear whether Rice would also come to Jerusalem to meet with Olmert and FM Tzipi Livni, or whether she would merely pop over to Jericho for a meeting with Abbas following her scheduled visit to Jordan. She was slated to make a final decision late Tuesday night.

Several media reported that she is probably expected to meet with Abbas in Jericho. Maariv quoted State Department Sean McCormack as saying on Tuesday that the Secretary could possibly have a meeting with Israeli officials.

Yediot reported that on Tuesday Abbas asked King Abdullah II of Jordan to convey to President Bush a message that he must take advantage of the momentum created by the cease-fire to resume Israeli-Palestinian peace negotiations immediately. The daily reported that Olmert and Abbas will apparently not take advantage of the Amman summit to meet today in the presence of President Bush and King Abdullah. Yediot reported that Olmert's bureau has informed the US that, fearing that such a meeting would raise huge expectations that the sides might not bear, Olmert has reservations about a meeting at this time. Yediot said that US administration envoy Elliott Abrams met with Olmert on Tuesday, praised him for his conciliatory speech, and did not mention a four-way summit.

Ha'aretz and Israel Radio reported that two rockets were launched from the northern Gaza Strip last night. The station reported that Fatah's Al-Aqsa Martyrs Brigades have claimed responsibility for the attack. The radio quoted Olmert as saying that the continuation of Qassam rocket fire is disappointing but that Israel will continue to respect the cease-fire. However, Israel Radio quoted Defense Minister Amir Peretz as saying that Israel will act against Palestinian groups that will continue to fire rockets at Israel. MK Tzachi Hanegbi, Chairman of the Knesset's Foreign Affairs and Defense Committee, was quoted as saying in an interview with Israel Radio this morning, that the test period that Israel granted the Palestinians is reaching its end. The Jerusalem Post and Yediot reported that on Tuesday in Nablus militants of the Al Aqsa Martyrs Brigades put on view what they claim is a new homemade rocket named "Jondallah" (Soldiers of God).

Major media reported that Egyptian intelligence chief Omar Suleiman will come to Israel today for talks on a deal over the release of soldier Gilad Shalit, who was kidnapped to Gaza by Hamas in a cross-border raid in June. Olmert said in his Sde Boker speech that Shalit's return was a precondition for diplomatic negotiations with the PA. Ha'aretz said that Suleiman will brief Olmert and other Israeli officials on his talks with Khaled Mashal, the head of Hamas's political bureau, last week. After these talks, the

Egyptians said that progress had been made toward finalizing a prisoner exchange. He will also discuss ways to shore up the cease-fire and other issues related to efforts to promote diplomatic negotiations between Israel and the PA. However, Ha'aretz quoted a source familiar with the negotiations over Shalit as saying that these talks are currently at an impasse due to disagreements over how many Palestinian prisoners Israel will free in exchange for the kidnapped soldier.

Ha'aretz (Zeev Schiff) reported that senior Israel Air Force officers met recently with the heads of the Foreign Ministry in Jerusalem on the issue of Israeli overflights of Lebanon, and that it was decided to establish an Israel-UNIFIL coordinating body. Schiff also reported that Hizbullah leader Hassan Nasrallah recently fired the commander responsible for the Baalbek area, Hasin Jamil Yunis, who is responsible for the region considered Hizbullah's logical center. The Jerusalem Post reported that Israeli military sources have told the newspaper that, in direct opposition to an order by IDF Chief of Staff Lt. Gen. Dan Halutz, the IDF's Northern Command led by its former chief, Maj. Gen. Udi Adam, is suspected of ordering the firing of cluster bombs into populated areas during the last few days of the war in Lebanon.

Israel Radio quoted Lebanese President Emile Lahud as saying in an interview with BBC-TV that Fouad Siniora's government is illegitimate and that Israel is behind the assassination of Lebanese Industry Minister Pierre Gemayel.

Yediot reported that student diaries distributed by Israel's Islamic Movement at the University of Haifa mark the birthdays of Osama bin Ladin and Hassan Nasrallah. All media reported that on Tuesday the police questioned Likud Chairman MK Binyamin Netanyahu on charges that he has let the Education Ministry fund polls conducted by Prof. Yaacov Katz, which he commissioned for his own use.

Ha'aretz Washington correspondent Shmuel Rosner reported that, during a briefing on Tuesday, US National Security Advisor Steven Hadley expressed the "most explicit public US position so far" against Israeli-Syrian negotiations. Ha'aretz noted that Hadley's comments are particularly interesting bearing in mind recent disclosures from the Baker/Hamilton committee.

The Jerusalem Post reported that the Israeli defense establishment plans to make an official decision in the coming days to invest 300 million shekels (around USD 69 million) in an anti-Qassam rocket and anti-Katyusha rocket defense system under development system under development by Rafael -- Israel's Armament Development Authority. In the body of the article, a sum of USD 300,000 is cited.

Israel Radio quoted Vice PM Shimon Peres as saying on Tuesday before students at Cornell University that settlements should be concentrated on approximately 8 percent of the West Bank land, while the Palestinians would be compensated with land outside the West Bank, so that they would have almost 100 percent compensation. Peres was quoted as saying that the Palestinians agree to such an arrangement. Peres also said that Israel admits to erring when it made use of cluster bombs during the recent Lebanon War.

Ha'aretz reported on rumors currently flying in Washington that, in his speech on Monday. Olmert hinted that he plans to release jailed Fatah leader Marwan Barghouti. The newspaper noted that some American officials believe that Barghouti's release could improve the prospects of Israeli-Palestinian peace. Israel Radio quoted Barghouti as saying that he has only met with Arab Knesset members. Barghouti denied recent reports that he met with Israeli politicians, including FM Livni, or that he is a party in any negotiations with Israel.

The Jerusalem Post quoted Palestinian security sources as saying that Palestinian FM Mahmoud Zahar, who returned to the Gaza Strip from abroad on Tuesday, brought with him nearly USD 20 million in cash.

Yediot reported that Shin Bet head Yuval Diskin met with UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Louise Arbour several days ago in order to present the moral dilemmas faced by Israel in its struggle against Palestinian terrorism. Arbour reportedly told Diskin that

targeted assassinations are illegitimate, that Israeli restrictions cause the Palestinian population to radicalize their views and weaken moderate Palestinian elements, and that Israel should compensate families of the Beit Hanun shelling victims, thus enabling it to prove its claim that the deaths resulted from an accident.

Ha'aretz reported that the GOI proposes to extend the Citizenship and Entry into Israel Law (the Temporary Order known as the "Citizenship Law") by two years, until the end of 2008, despite harsh criticism leveled at it by the High Court of Justice. The government seeks to expand the law to cover several "threat states," presumably mainly Arab and Muslim countries.

Meretz Chairman MK Yossi Beilin was quoted as saying in an interview with Maariv that scary pronouncements by Olmert and Netanyahu on Iran's nuclear program are "anti-Zionist" and potentially cause Israelis to leave the country.

Yediot and The Jerusalem Post reported that the IDF has created a unit that will emulate Hizbullah fighters and Syrian soldiers for training purposes. Israel Radio cited the Lebanese newspaper Al-Mustaqbal as saying that Lebanese security forces have uncovered a Syrian plan to assassinate 36 opponents of Syria in Lebanon. Leading media cited an announcement by the Syrian government that Omar Abdullah, a Syrian leader of the Islamic militant group Tawheed Wajihad, blew himself up at a Syrian border post along the Lebanese border after a gun battle with Syrian security forces on Tuesday.

The Jerusalem Post quoted AP as saying that Hizbullah denied on Tuesday that it was raining fighters from the Mahdi Army, and Iraqi Shi'ite militia blamed for sectarian killings in the war-torn country.

The Jerusalem Post quoted Sudan's President Field Marshal Omar Hassan Ahmed al-Bashir as saying on Tuesday in a video-link interview with the newspaper that reported in Western newspapers of hundreds of thousands dead in his country's brutal civil war were all part of an Israeli-led worldwide conspiracy.

Leading media reported that the Jewish Agency and European Jewish organizations will hold a mass solidarity rally today with the kidnapped Israeli soldiers in front of the EU institutions in Brussels.

Yediot and Maariv reported that Segolene Royal, the Socialist contender for the French presidency, will visit Israel on Sunday. Her announced trip follows criticism in Israel of her alleged indifference to Israel and French Jewry.

Ha'aretz reported that the heads of the American Jewish Committee sent Olmert an unusually harsh letter on Tuesday, warning him that if a proposed change goes through in the Law of Return (of Jews to Israel) excluding converts in the definition of a Jew, it could seriously impair support for Israel among American Jews.

Ha'aretz reported that a group of Israeli organizations headed by Pensioners' Affairs Minister Rafi Eitan, who holds the Diaspora affairs portfolio, announced this week that Israel wants the right to appoint half the members of the executive of the Conference on Jewish Material Claims Against Germany, a US-based organization that represents world Jewry and Holocaust survivors in their negotiations over reparations from Germany. Eitan estimates the Claims Conference's financial reserves at some USD 1.7 billion. Every year, the conference gives grants totaling about USD 90 million to organizations worldwide that help Holocaust survivors or are involved in Holocaust education and remembrance. About half of this money goes to Israeli organizations.

All media highlighted the open-ended general strike in the public sector, which started at 06:00 local time today. The strike is over withheld wages of workers in some local authorities. Traffic at the country's airports and seaports will be brought to a halt.

Mideast:

Summary:

Washington correspondent Shmuel Rosner wrote on page one of the independent, left-leaning Ha'aretz: "Iraq, the mammoth in the middle of the room, is the key issue of [President Bush's] visit [to Jordan]. However important, anything else is no more than a side show."

Chief Economic Editor Sever Plotker wrote in the editorial of the mass-circulation, pluralist Yediot Aharonot: "Instead of pursuing the illusion of a 'political horizon' with Hamas ... the Israeli government could have and should launch negotiations with an Arab government that is willing to have full peace with us, meaning Syria. This is the only attainable peace."
Ha'aretz editorialized: "The cease-fire will be able to take hold only if it applies to both the Gaza Strip and the West Bank."

Conservative columnist Yosef Harif wrote in the popular, pluralist Maariv: "If Israel accepts to hold negotiations with the Palestinian Authority without insisting on the respect of the first clause [of the Roadmap], it will place itself into a dangerous Catch-22 situation."

Gidi Grinstein, founder and president of the Re'ut Institute (www.reut-institute.org), who served on the Israeli delegation to the negotiations with the PLO from 1999 to 2001, wrote in the conservative, independent Jerusalem Post: "What is better for Israel: a functioning Hamas government in the Palestinian Authority that may serve as an 'address' or the imminent total breakdown of Palestinian governance?"

Block Quotes:

I. "Summit of Fear"

Washington correspondent Shmuel Rosner wrote on page one of the independent, left-leaning Ha'aretz (11/29): "Iraq, the mammoth in the middle of the room, is the key issue of [President Bush's] visit [to Jordan]. However important, anything else is no more than a side show.... [Jordan's King] Abdullah's fear [of a civil war in Iraq] is backed by frightening figures. Iraqi refugees are inundating Jordan at an overwhelming pace -- they add up to almost one million. On Tuesday the King added a new concern to this anxiety: He warned about developments that would cause residents of the Palestinian West Bank to settle in Jordan, too. He said that he would not allow this.... [Since outgoing State Department adviser Philip Zelikow linked a few months ago the solution of the Iran crisis to progress on the Israeli-Palestinian track] there has been no real advance in both those arenas.... Bush's visit to Jordan will certainly not be the harbinger of a breakthrough."

II. "Tell Me the Truth"

Chief Economic Editor Sever Plotker wrote in the editorial of the mass-circulation, pluralist Yediot Aharonot (11/29): "Hamas is perceived as the organization that holds the key to calm in the Middle East, and therefore it is necessary to put up with it. And the Israeli government is indeed accepting it.... Like thieves in the night, without any in-depth public debate and without asking the citizens, the Israeli government has accepted as an established fact the legitimate control of Hamas over the Palestinian Authority, and the necessity of reaching arrangements with it -- without Hamas, for its part, having agreed to accept even one of the conditions set for recognizing Israel or speaking with Israel, as formulated by us. From Israel's side, the die has been cast, and it would be best for the government to act with transparency and to speak the truth: Hamas is from now on the official Palestinian partner for dialogue. Abu Mazen is good as a cardboard policeman who has been placed by the roadside for the duration of President Bush's visit to the Middle East. When Bush goes, Abu Mazen will be folded up.... Neither Ehud Olmert nor Abu Mazen, Marwan Barghouti, nor even Ismail Haniyeh come out as winners from the critical confrontation between the Israeli government and the Hamas government. The winner is Khaled Mashal, a terrorist activist, a dark and fanatic figure, who has been the target of an Israeli assassination more than once. Instead of pursuing the illusion of a 'political horizon' with Hamas, the result of which is issuing Hamas a certificate of

legitimacy, the Israeli government could have and should launch negotiations with an Arab government that is willing to have full peace with us, meaning Syria. This is the only attainable peace."

III. "Cease the Fire in the West Bank, Too"

Ha'aretz editorialized (11/29): "The cease-fire will be able to take hold only if it applies to both the Gaza Strip and the West Bank. It is impossible to separate what happens in these two places: Every military operation in the West Bank is liable to draw a response from Gaza, and vice versa.... Anyone who wants to give the cease-fire a chance must impose maximum restraint on himself.... This is the time to demonstrate openness and generosity. Israel must give the cease-fire a chance, and not bring about its collapse through unnecessary military operations, as has happened more than once with past cease-fires. The order of the day must now be: Cease the fire, both in the Gaza Strip and in the West Bank."

IV. "A Palestinian Terror State"

Conservative columnist Yosef Harif wrote in the popular, pluralist Maariv (11/29): "The [Israeli] public does not feel that the cease-fire with the Palestinians constitutes a real turning-point that may lead to a matter-of-fact dialogue towards a peace agreement. Israel has more than once experienced cease-fires that were used by terrorist organizations to rearm; they did not contain an expression of willingness to negotiate over any concession.... Now that a cease-fire, the length no one can assess, has been reached, there is a concern that the European states will view it as an achievement that has to be maintained and pressure Israel into agreeing to hold negotiations unconditionally. From this point of view it would be worthwhile to follow the understandings that will be reached at President Bush's upcoming meeting with King Abdullah in Amman. If Israel accepts to hold negotiations with the Palestinian Authority without insisting on the respect of the first clause [of the Roadmap -- the termination of violence against Israel], it will place itself into a dangerous Catch-22 situation: Israel will be required to make concessions in order to allow the establishment of a Palestinian state, with the extremist terrorist organizations remaining in place, without receiving any authority, and state-of-the-art weapons they are amassing in huge quantities continuing to threaten Israel."

IV. "The Axis of Resistance"

Gidi Grinstein, founder and president of the Re'ut Institute (www.reut-institute.org), who served on the Israeli delegation to the negotiations with the PLO from 1999 to 2001, wrote in the conservative, independent Jerusalem Post (11/29): "Some moderates in the region are beginning to frame America as a liability and to hedge their bets with the new 'hegemone' in Tehran. Unless the US throws many more resources into the problem or establishes clear priorities, it may experience a domino effect from Afghanistan to Cairo. This may compromise Israel in ways that resemble the impact of the decline of the Soviet empire on its Arab proteges. In the present strategic makeup, Israel's paths toward securing its existence in the region have been effectively blocked while the vision of an Islamic, Arab or Palestinian state in its place is advanced.... Israel has to question some working assumptions that have been taken for granted for too long. For example, what is better for Israel: a functioning Hamas government in the Palestinian Authority that may serve as an 'address' or the imminent total breakdown of Palestinian governance? Which is more important: preserving Israel's freedom of action or creating closer alliance with moderate Arab countries that are also compromised by radical Shi'ite Islam? Is the establishment of a Palestinian state an Israeli concession or an Israeli interest? There is no silver bullet here. It is time for Israel to be relevant again and to shape our national security."

JONES